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## INTRODUCTION

The life expectancy and mortality risk rates of Black men are of interest among public health researchers. In 2016, the life expectancy of Black men was 71.8 compared with 76.3 for White men.<sup>1</sup> Although still relatively high, Black men's overall relative risk of mortality was reduced from 1.36 (95% CI: 1.35 to 1.37) in 2000 to 1.21 (95% CI: 1.20 to 1.21) in 2014 when compared with White men.<sup>2</sup> For Black men, mortality is affected by a wide range of biopsychosocial risk exposures during critical periods of the life course, one of which is the point when Black men become involved in the workforce and are exposed to work-related stress.<sup>3</sup>

One of the driving causes of this stress may be the norm adopted within the United States that defines masculinity as the ability to successfully work and adequately provide for family while having a sense of efficacy and control.<sup>4</sup>

However, Black men's work experiences as they transition from adolescence to adult working age are associated with unresolved conflicts related to employment inequality that often mediate masculinity.<sup>5</sup> In turn, some research has shown that Black men who ascribed to a strong work ethic but were unable to actualize the expected male role reported increased stress and health problems and were less likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors.<sup>6</sup>

A PubMed search using phrases such as "occupational stress/work stress/work-related stress and life course," "occupational stress and life course," "occupational stress/work stress/work-related stress and Black men," "occupational stress/work stress/work-related stress and African American men," "occupational stress/work stress/work-related stress and mortality," and "occupational stress/work stress/work-related stress and life expectancy" found only one study published in 2005 that included Black men — showing that data regarding work-related stress and mortality risk across the life course of Black men are lacking.

## WORK-RELATED STRESS AND MORTALITY IN BLACK MEN

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that workforce

participation rates for Black men (64.1%) were the lowest among adult men in the largest racial and ethnic groups compared with White men (72%), Asian men (75.3%) and Hispanic men (80.5%).<sup>7</sup> Black men in the labor force are more likely than men from other ethnic groups to work in low-complexity work environments and be exposed to increased work stressors including shift work, low control and high demands, poor-to-no health insurance, longer hours, and job insecurity — which are predictors for increased work-related stressors<sup>3</sup> and a 15.4% increase in mortality.<sup>8</sup>

Kivimaki and colleagues found that men diagnosed with cardiometabolic disease (presence of coronary heart disease, stroke, or diabetes) and who worked in environments exposed to job strain had higher mortality risk rates than those in work environments with no job strain. These mortality risk rates were comparable to rates for men who were smokers but higher than the mortality risk rates of men who had been physically inactive or diagnosed with hypertension, obesity, and high alcohol use.<sup>9</sup> Goh and colleagues found that when the life expectancy loss due to work-related stress was examined by gender and race, individuals in the lowest educational stratum had the highest mortality risk rates and

Black men experienced a life expectancy loss of 2.77 years compared with 1.72 years for White men.<sup>3</sup>

## NEED FOR RESEARCH ON LIFE COURSE INFLUENCES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

Mortality risk rates reflect the accumulation of multiple influences over the life course. Historically, Black men's work life has been riddled with inequality that led to lower levels of job satisfaction and was associated with work-related stress.<sup>10</sup> Black men have had limited employment opportunities, with most available jobs having higher occupational and psychosocial hazards such as: auto and steel plants, where they were exposed to the chemical associated with metal casting and blast furnaces; meat-cutting plants with high risks of exposure to injury due to cutting tools and machinery; and other factory work requiring use of heavy force or thousands of daily repetitive motions placing the men at high risk of the musculoskeletal disorders. Black men have been routinely exposed to employment discrimination that included poor working conditions, low wage earnings, lack of job autonomy, and job insecurity.<sup>10</sup> Although the Civil Rights movement afforded Black men greater access to high complexity jobs, there remains high exposure to many low complexity jobs and associated work-related stress.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, relatively little research has been conducted on how factors over the life course influence mortality risk rates associated with work-related stress among Black men. On an average day, most US workers em-

ployed fulltime (84.1%) spend more awake time in the work environment than in the home environment — Black men aged <16 years spend an average of 42.6 hours weekly in the work environment.<sup>8</sup> Given the cumulative amount of lifetime hours spent at work, the influence of work on the mortality risk rates of Black men may be particularly important.

## CALL TO ACTION

To better understand and subsequently mitigate the effects of work-related stress and associated mortality risk rates among Black men, a multidimensional work-stress framework over the life course would help to define and address the mechanisms that could be modified at each life stage. The framework should be designed with broad pathways to include other life stressors (eg, neighborhood, criminal justice contact, financial, race-related stressors, etc.) and afford the opportunity to examine modifiers such as education and discrimination of Black men at the different points in the employment relationship (eg, hiring, wage determination, promotion, termination). As such, this would provide an opportunity to examine multiple stress points in Black men's lives and may reveal past factors that contribute to mortality risk rates associated with work-related stress. Considering the life course factors associated with work-related stress offers an important direction for improving the health and longevity of Black men, which could be applicable to the US working population with similar rates of work-related stress.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest to report.

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